

City Hall
West end of Exchange Place
Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-192

HABS
RI,
4-PROV,
92-

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. RI-192

CITY HALL

HABS
RI,
4-PROV,
92-

Address: West end of Exchange Place, Providence, Providence
County, Rhode Island

Present Owner
and Occupant: City of Providence

Present Use: City offices

Brief Statement
of Significance: This large masonry building, built in the heart
of Providence in an academic, Renaissance Revival
style, has housed the Providence City government
since its dedication in 1878.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: City of Providence
2. Date of erection: Committee to procure plans and estimates appointed by the City Council March 26, 1874. Cornerstone laid June 24, 1875. Building dedicated November 14, 1878.
3. Architect: E. L. Anthony was named advisory architect to develop preliminary floor plans. A competition for the design of the building was judged by two local architects, Alpheus C. Morse and Henry Childs. The award was made to Samuel J. F. Thayer of Boston who described the style of his design as "Renaissance, of the character widely adopted for civic buildings in the most advanced cities of the world" (Quoted in Cady, Civic and Architectural Development of Providence, p. 150). Twenty-one designs were submitted in the competition. Second place went to Charles B. Atwood. Other entries were by Ware and Van Brunt, T. M. Clark, and McKim and Mead who submitted a complex Queen Anne design.
4. Notes on alterations and additions: The top floor was remodeled in 1914; Jackson, Robertson and Adams, architects. This remodeling gave more office space inside, but did not greatly affect the exterior appearance of the building.
5. Sources of information

John Hutchins Cady, The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence 1636-1950 (Providence, Rhode Island:

The Book Shop, 1957), pp. 137, 149, 150, 218.

The Architectural Sketch Book (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company), vol. II, no. 6 (December, 1874). This article reported on the competition and published perspectives of two of the entries: Plate XXIII by Samuel J. F. Thayer; Plate XXIV by Ware and Van Brunt.

American Architect and Building News published several articles on the City Hall:

Vol. I (March 25, 1876), p. 99 describing the construction and the central hall, with plans of the basement, first, second, third and fourth floors, and a perspective of the central hall and staircase:

Vol. II (November 24, 1877), p. 376 on the interior decorations, with elevations of the council chamber and the mayor's and aldermen's chamber:

Vol. III (March 30, 1878), p. 110 on the construction of the building, with an elevation of the facade:

Vol. IV (August 3, 1878), p. 43, a letter to the editor mentioning a recent competition for the interior decoration with entries by "Messrs. McPherson, LaFarge, Rinn, Frank Hill Smith, and others."

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is a large masonry building, built in the 1870's in an academic, Renaissance Revival manner characteristic of the period.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in good condition and does not appear to have been altered or changed.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Rectangular building, 133'-8" (front facing east) x 160'; 92'-4" high including elevated ground level basement and four floors; on the exterior the second and third stories are treated as a single story, and the fourth story is above the cornice line of the mansard roof; a slightly projecting entrance pavilion is carried above the roof in a low, square dome.
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Wall construction: Exterior walls of Westerly, Rhode Island, and Concord granite, backed by vaulted brick walls. Exterior decoration - Doric first story, Corinthian second story, Ionic on upper story of entrance pavilion. Decorative features in cast iron.

4. Porches: Deep entranceway in center pavilion on east front, with grand flight of stairs, leads up to first story, entrance flanked by two-story porch with paired columns, balcony at second floor level, segmental pediment at cornice line.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doors: Grand entrance on center pavilion to first floor, other entrances with lighted wood doors on other three sides lead to basement.
 - b. Windows: Double hung windows with large, single panes of glass. Most windows grouped in pairs or threes.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Mansard roof and dome made of Tiel concrete slabs fitted to T-irons, covered with slate and copper.
 - b. Cornice: Heavy molded and bracketed cornices.
 - c. Dormers: Three-part dormer windows in mansard roof light fourth story.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: The building is laid out around a large, skylighted central hall 27' x 63', with a grand staircase leading to the second floor. A corridor, 12' wide, extends entirely around the central hall on all floors from which open all the principal rooms on the east, front, side of the building continue in their original use: On the first floor the Treasurer and Collector's Office is at the southeast, the Mayor's Office at the northeast; on the second floor the Council Chamber occupies the main room in the building in the central pavilion directly above the doorway; the Mayor's and Aldermen's chamber is at the northeast above the Mayor's office. Both chambers are a full two stories high.
2. Stairways: Grand staircase in central hall, T-shape, cast-iron frame with marble steps, heavy iron balustrade.
3. Flooring: Most floors covered with marble or slate tile. Floors supported on brick arches on built-up plate girders and rolled beams.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Most areas have simple plaster walls and ceilings, painted. Council Chamber with paired pilasters on pediments, and Mayor and Aldermen's Chamber with elaborate arcading, richly painted with details picked out in gold; rooms complete with original furniture. In the central hall: polished granite columns; iron bases, capitals, balustrades, etc; other decoration of stucco. Interior walls and arches are of brick, some minor partitions of concrete block.
5. Doors: Various original wood doors in place, some with etched glass lights, light woodwork, natural yellow color, varnished.
6. Hardware: Original brass hardware with large flat round knobs and escutcheons with elaborate incised decorations.
7. Modern electric lighting.
8. Heating: Central

D. Site

The building faces a large Federal Building across Exchange Place, a block-long, open area with landscaped center strip, in the center of the Providence business district.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect
National Park Service
February 1962

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

Addendum to

City Hall (Providence City Hall)
West End of Exchange Place (Kennedy Plaza)
Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-192

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

HABS
RI
192

WRITTEN DATA FOR CITY HALL PROJECT

NAME: Providence City Hall

LOCATION: West end of Kennedy Plaza bounded by Dorrance, Fulton, Eddy, and Washington Streets. The main entrance faces Dorrance Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903.

PRESENT OWNER AND OCCUPANT: City of Providence

PRESENT USE: City Offices

SIGNIFICANCE: The Providence City Hall completed in 1878 serves as the center of Providence city government. It is a classic example of France's Second Empire style in America and serves as a key architectural anchor on Kennedy Plaza.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. The Providence City Hall was dedicated on November 15, 1878. Initial action to construct a city hall was taken by the Providence City Council on November 10, 1845 when a resolution was adopted to appoint a committee to seek plans for a city hall, look for a suitable location, and provide cost estimates. Various other resolutions were passed by successive councils, but no positive action was taken. On February 13, 1854, however, a committee was directed to purchase land which is the present site of the Providence City Hall and that transaction was completed on April 22, 1854. Twenty years passed following the land purchase until the City Council passed another resolution calling for a committee to advertise for plans for a city hall. On April 16, 1874, a resolution was passed which permitted the committee to award a premium to the successful competitor, without the approval of the City Council, and on October 8, 1874 the City Council passed another resolution which detailed the duties of the City Hall Commission.

The corner-stone of the Providence City Hall was laid on Thursday, June 24, 1875, at 11 o'clock. Work had actually commenced on the excavation of the lot

on October 19, 1874. On Thursday, November 14, 1878, the dedication of the Providence City Hall took place.

This information was compiled from The City Hall, Providence. The Providence Press Company, 1881, which was issued in honor of the dedication.

2. Architect

The City Hall Commission secured the services of Mr. E. L. Angell, as advisory architect, to make general floor plans of the building. Advertisements were then sent out for plans and estimates. Twenty one plans were received by the committee. Mr. Samuel J. F. Thayer of Boston was awarded the first premium out of all the competitors. (Evidence connecting the architect to the building can be found in The City Hall, Providence, 1881)

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers

Please see pages 89 to 95 of The City Hall, Providence, 1881 which contains an extract from the final report of the City Hall Commissioners.

4. Original Plans and Construction

For a detailed description please see pages 105 to 108 of the enclosed publication. The original plans are on deposit at the Rhode Island Historical Society Library, 121 Hope Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02906. The records of the City Hall Commission are located in the Providence City Archives in Providence City Hall. The building is constructed of Westerly and New Hampshire granite.

5. Alterations and Additions

The top floor was remodeled in 1914, by the firm of Jackson, Robertson, and Adams. This remodeling at an approximate cost of \$150,000 provided more office space inside, but did not greatly affect the building's exterior appearance. The Providence City Hall is presently in the later phases of a restoration program begun in 1975.

B. Historical Context

The Providence City Hall has housed the municipal government in Providence since its dedication in 1878. As a result the building is intimately tied to the rich and interesting history of this commercial and industrial center of Rhode Island.

For a late nineteenth century account see The Providence Plantations For Two Hundred and Fifty Years (1886) by Welcome Arnold Greene. A four volume work by Charles Carroll entitled Rhode Island: Three Centuries of Democracy (1932) presents a good comprehensive history of the state to that time. Paul F. Gleeson's Rhode Island: The Development of a Democracy (1957) gives a textbook account of Rhode Island up to the mid twentieth century, and William G. McLoughlin's Rhode Island, A History (1978), issued as a bicentennial history, is a brief but comprehensive account. These secondary sources are among many which will give the reader an idea of the type of events and persons which were associated with the city government and the city hall of Rhode Island's capital city. In addition Rhode Island History, a quarterly publication of the Rhode Island Historical Society contains a number of articles on Providence History.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of the Exterior

Please refer to the first three paragraphs of number 7, description, contained on the nomination form for the National Register of Historic Places. A copy of this data sheet is enclosed. Also see Part II, Section B of the description of the exterior for the Historic American Buildings Survey, a copy of which is enclosed.

B. Description of the Interior

Please refer to paragraphs four to nine of number 7, description, contained on the nomination form for the National Register of Historic Places. Also see

Part II, Section C, of the description of the interior for the Historic American Buildings Survey and refer to pages 105 to 108 of the enclosed publication The City Hall, Providence, 1881.

C. Site

The Providence City Hall is located at the west end of Kennedy Plaza, a small park in the downtown business district. The Federal Building which is similar in height and width to City Hall occupies the opposite end of the plaza.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings

Thayer's original plans for the building's construction 1874 - 1878 are on loan to the Rhode Island Historical Society Library, 121 Hope Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02906.

The plans for the alterations of the building in 1914 are in the Providence City Hall.

B. Early Views

An early photograph is enclosed in the dedication publication, The City Hall, Providence, 1881. Other early views are housed at the Providence Public Library, 150 Emlire Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903; the Rhode Island Historical Society, 121 Hope Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02906; and the Providence City Archives, Providence City Hall, Providence, Rhode Island 02903. Among the Providence City Archives' holdings is an exterior drawing by Thayer.

C. Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

** The City Hall, Providence, 1881, published by the city in honor of the dedication; Ordinances and Resolutions of the Providence City Council; minutes of the meetings of the City Hall Commission; Common Council Records and

Records of the Board of Aldermen; and correspondence of Mayor Doyle, who served during the construction of City Hall, are located in the Providence City Archives, Providence City Hall, Providence, Rhode Island 02903.

2. Secondary Sources

Cady, John Hutchins. The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence, 1636 - 1950. Providence, Rhode Island: The Book Shop, 1957

The Architectural Sketch Book. Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, Vol. II, no. 6, December, 1874.

American Architect and Building News.

Vol. I (March 25, 1876)
Vol. II (November 24, 1877)
Vol. III (March 30, 1878)
Vol. IV (August 3, 1878)

Please see Part I Section B of this report for other historical works.

Downtown Providence. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1981.

D. Not applicable

E. A copy of The City Hall, Providence, 1881 is enclosed along with copies of the Historic American Buildings Survey pertaining to the Providence City Hall and The National Register of Historic Places, Inventory - Nomination Form also pertaining to City Hall.

Joseph A. Chrostowski
City Archivist
Providence City Archives
August 28, 1981

N.B. THE CITY HALL, PROVIDENCE, 1881, IS INCLUDED IN THE FIELD RECORDS FOR PROVIDENCE CITY HALL. THIS PUBLICATION CONSISTS OF 108 PAGES, FOUR FLOOR PLANS, ENGRAVING, SPEECHES, DETAILED DESCRIPTION AND COST BREAKDOWN. IMPORTANT PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIAL.

WM LEBOVICH 3/13/84